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ABSTRACT

The early childhood education department at Humber College in Toronto has developed a model for team collaboration that has been successful for 10 years. This model provides for the development of teamwork skills by their students by engaging them in assignments that require collaboration with college instructors and professionals outside the college in order to plan and implement a project for a community early childhood education site. This article explains how the model works: It empowers students by allowing them to make decisions within certain parameters and work with faculty and professionals outside the college environment on "real" projects that affect the lives of community members. The faculty and professionals assist students in setting realistic goals and help them to carry out the project, which is included as part of their field experience. The article also contains copies of the contract that is signed between the students and their respective team members, an example of a project outline, and masters for overhead transparencies. (CB)

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ED 433 905



# TEAMSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Collaborative learning and working as a team are skills valued in the workforce and encouraged in community college programs. One model of teamship development has been fostered in the early childhood education department at Humber College, Toronto. This model includes students in their graduating semester, the college instructor(s) and professionals from related community organizations/agencies. Does it work? This collaborative model has been highly successful for well over 10 years. To briefly examine why/how it works, it is necessary to look at the various components and the benefits accrued to all parties.

## THE STUDENTS.

Firstly, **the students** are empowered by making choices such as: the type of project (chosen from a list of possibilities), team members from the class, an appropriate topic, and what organization or agency in the community is best suited to support their project. Students in early childhood attend a field practicum or practice teaching during this semester, and they are encouraged to choose one of the field practicums as their collaborative team site. Being equally responsible for the outcomes and success of the project, the students liaise and work with the professionals in the neighborhood organization. They gain practical experience. They soon realize that the decisions they make do affect others. They realize that this is *not a case study;* this project involves real people. The decisions have real consequences. Without exception students stop thinking of this project as "our assignment", and begin talking about it in terms of what has to get done, who do we have to talk to, what happens if this doesn't work out... what will be our

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back-up plan, and so on. Working with others and making sure the event/project is a success becomes more important than thinking of it as "an assignment we have to do".

THE ASSIGNMENT/ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTOR

On the first day of class, the students are given the assignment. At that time, they are given the list of events/projects such as: a formal parent meeting, a newsletter, a resource file, an Open House with educational focus, a community advocacy project, fundraiser or co-hosting a special event in the community (see brief mock-up of assignment as an example). They are given 2-3 weeks to decide on the project, their team members, and find a co-operative field practicum site.

Once those decisions are made, the team signs a contract with the instructor (see example Contract). In a portfolio throughout the semester, entries are made regarding the team's progress including any examples of letters sent or handouts given. Areas are discussed as required with the instructor. Students are encouraged to problem-solve. Borrowing Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding, the instructor is involved in the beginning of the assignment to help set realistic parameters and goals with the team. Once the project is underway with the professionals in organization, the instructor should act as a monitor intervening only when the team requests assistance or when absolutely necessary. The instructor adopts a facilitator's role, a monitoring role and assists in maintaining the timeline. Given the students have less than four months to plan, implement, evaluate and present, a conscious effort to remain on task is crucial for the success of the project/event.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Focus on Families
Sally Wylie

Parent Education Project
25% of Final Grade

**Parent Education Project (January-April 1999). Options listed as follows:**

1. Newsletter: Students will choose a centre and compile a newsletter in cooperation with staff and supervisor of that centre. The newsletter must include: a minimum of one article written and researched by students, a staff interview, list of upcoming community events/resources relevant to parents in the neighbourhood/geographical area, news from the centre (e.g. news from Infant Room, Toddler Room) and/or other specific contributions designated by centre supervisor. The newsletter content must reflect the interests/needs/culture of the families involved in the centre. The final product **MUST BE** approved by the supervisor before it goes to print or is circulated to the parents of the centre.
   *Group size: 3 - 5 depending on scope of project*

2. Parent Education Meeting (Lunchtime/After School/Open House/Evening):
   Students will choose a host centre from one of their current field placements. Based on discussions with staff and canvassing parents for their input, students will determine the topic, date and time, and type of parent meeting. (See separate hand-out for details)
   *Group size: 3 - 5 depending on scope of project*

3. *Early Childhood Community Event/Advocacy:* Students will take part in a community event which addresses the interests/needs of the families in a particular region. As part of an existing community event, students will present information appropriate to families in collaboration with professionals in the early childhood field.
   *Group size: 3 - 5 depending on scope of project*

*Instructor approval must be obtained PRIOR to beginning the project. Each group must sign a contract and up-date as advised. Further details regarding each option will be presented in class verbally and/or in writing. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the unique expectations of each option.*

**THIS IS NOT A CASE STUDY!!!**
**THESE PROJECTS INVOLVE REAL PEOPLE!**
**Professionalism in all aspects of the project is a very real expectation.**

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

Focus on Families S. Wylie, Instructor

Parent Education Project

CONTRACT

Students will work in small groups (3-5) choosing one project from the six provided. This project will be completed over the Winter Semester. Once a project and group are chosen, the group will sign a Project Contract.

This contract is an agreement between all members of the group and the instructor indicating choice of topic, group members. Progress up-dates are part of the project.

---

Our Project is: _____

_____

_____

_____

Our Group members are: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

The setting we are at is: _____

_____

_____

Contact person is: _____

This project **MUST** be approved by the Instructor. Any changes from the original plan must also be approved by the instructor.

Within TWO WEEKS of contract approval, a progress up-date and strategies for completion of this project will be submitted.

Today's Date: _____ Project Update: _____

Fill out the above areas and return it to the Instructor.

This project teaches students: leadership, ownership of responsibility, time management and communication within teams.

In a class of 30 students in their graduating semester, the instructor can safely assume that he/she will have at least six groups. Depending on the project the group may realistically only have three team members (two is NOT a choice). If the project is quite large (a spaghetti dinner for eighty parents), then the group would be larger. A limit of five or six might be appropriate.

The instructor would need to set the stage for the students initially with examples of previous projects, thorough discussion of expectations, and hand-outs with the choices and objectives clearly stated. Students would need time initially to brainstorm their choices of projects or topics. During these first weeks, they should be encouraged to examine more than one possibility so they do not make their choice too quickily only to discover later that "we wish we would have....."

Since this project involves working collaboratively with professionals in the field, the students must realize the implications of their participation. The students need to be well aware of the professionalism they must demonstrate in working "outside" the college.

ORGANIZATIONS/AGENCIES

Professionals in the community gladly welcome the extra team members to plan and implement a project which will benefit - directly or indirectly- their families. The agency staff enjoy working with the student-teachers as this process infuses them with new ideas. By having to guide, assist and role model, the professionals become refocused and re-energized in their goals of providing extra services to the families in the organization. The professionals collaborate with the students in all aspects of the project/event from planning to final evaluation. As a result, the children and

families benefit from extra resources/ideas/relationships.

Through students and instructor(s), the college enhances its role in the community. In supporting collaborative projects in the community, the collage shares in the training process. This process promotes dialogue with professional members in the field and recognizes them as lifelong learners. The community, in turn, appreciates the college's participation in promoting educational opportunities.

EVALUATION

If teamship is the focus on this assignment, then the process must clearly be evaluated as well as the success of the event/project. As with the entire process, the evaluation is completed by the student group, the organization/agency professionals and the instructor of the course. The student group must evaluate each other and themselves in terms of their collaborative effort. This evaluation covers all phases of the event/project: planning, implementation AND assessment. The professionals are given feedback sheets to comment on the planning and implementation from their perspective. The instructor evaluates the entire project. The criteria and process of the evaluation should be shared with the students during the first two-three weeks of class so they understand clearly that ALL aspects of the project are considered, not just the final product or event. When students understand that work related skills such as: time management, task completion, consideration and respect for others and clear communication are evaluated and therefore, VALUED, a different perspective is developed: TEAMSHIP. They realize this assignment is NOT a case study; it involves real people with real consequences.

# TEAMSHIP

# DEVELOPMENT

This is not a Case Study!

# TEAMSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

## COMMUNITY BASED PARENT PROJECT
## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## Teamship Development between

- Students
- Community
- College

# Stages of Teamship Development

- TIMELINE
- STAGES
- SCAFFOLDING
- TEAMS

# TIMELINE

**January**

Stage One: Planning & Team Formation

**February**

Stage Two: Community Contact

**March**

Stage Three: Implementation

**April**

Stage Four: Evaluation

# Stage One: Planning & Team Formation

**Focus: Establish Teams & Identify Project**

- Setting the stage begins in first class
- Options are explained/handouts given
- Students choose teams(3-5)members
- Students choose type of project - examples
- Sign Contract for the semester & hand in for approval

Scaffold: Contract
Teams: Students in-class - college
Students & Instructor - college

# Stage Two: Community Contact

**Focus: Establishing roles/relationships with professionals/agency - negotiating tasks**

- Information gathering in the community
- Assessing timelines
- Determining priorities of tasks-roles
- Maintain/support relationships in student team
- Develop roles/relationships with community team
- Contract up-dates with Instructor

Scaffold: Contract up-date(s)
Instructor's letter to community

Teams: Student team, Students & Instructor,
Students & Community contacts

# Stage Three: Implementation

**Focus: Organizing last details, team(s) participation**
**Presenting self-project professionally**

- Reaffirming roles/relationships within teams
- Materials/resources displayed professionally
- Final presentation tuned for target audience
- Collaborative participation for mutual benefit
- Begin to assemble data for evaluation

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| Scaffold: | Contract up-date(s) |
| Teams: | Student team |
| | Community team |

# Stage Four: Evaluation

**Focus: Project Evaluation (4 types)**

- #1: Community Evaluation
- #2: Team Evaluation
- #3: Individual Evaluation-Collaborative Learning
- #4: Instructor Evaluation-All stages from all teams

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| Scaffold: | Students will self & group evaluate, Community feedback & Instructor |
| Teams: | Student team, Students & Instructor, Students & Community contacts |

## REALITY TEACHES & students learn to:

- Develop time management skills
- Express ideas & listen to others
- Appreciate "others" perspective
- Assume roles in project framework
- Take ownership of responsibility
- Make responsible group decisions
- Present self/project professionally
- Evaluate self/others